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ABSTRACT

Initiated in October 1970, the program trained teachers to use an individualized teaching approach to teach a cross-age range of children in a small group (six to eight children). Over the winter, the teachers received intensive training with the expectation that during the mobile phase they would be required to work with the children in isolated settings where they could not rely on the daily supervision and support services which would have been available in a larger center. By recruiting adult migrants as teachers, who were willing to continue migrating as they served the children in this new role, the program was able to scatter its teachers in as many directions as the families moved when the migration began from the home base site. The program was evaluated after two years of operation. Summarizing the evaluative data, this report covers the program's: (1) delivery system, (2) educational quality, (3) use of migrant adults as paraprofessional teachers, and (4) long range accountability. Overall the program has been successful. (NQ)

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THE MINI HEAD START PROGRAM

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

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A demonstration project in mobile services to migrant children.

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The Office of Child Development
Migrant and Indian Programs Division

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THE MINI HEAD START PROGRAM--TWO-YEAR EVALUATION

The MINI HEAD START program was funded in part by the national migrant desk of Head Start, in part by the Public Service Careers program of the Department of Labor, and in part by the Office of Education Division of Bilingual Education.

The national migrant desk of Head Start's interests in the evaluation of this program centered on the following four issues important to policy makers planning services for migrant children.

1. DELIVERY SYSTEM

   What is the most effective way to provide continuity of educational services to children who move?

2. EDUCATIONAL QUALITY

   Can paraprofessional teachers after limited training, working under the handicaps of moving, temporary facilities, limited supervision and long distance administration, maintain a program of high educational quality?

3. USE OF MIGRANT ADULTS AS PARAPROFESSIONAL TEACHERS

   With intensive training, can a paraprofessional teacher provide children an educational experience comparable to that a professional could offer them?

4. LONG RANGE ACCOUNTABILITY

   What is the best means of overcoming the erratic attendance patterns and high turnover in evaluating the benefits of a migrant educational program, and can long range benefits be found in an interstate program over unrelated local short term educational efforts?

The following report summarizes the findings from two years of program operation (the program was initiated October, 1970 and evaluative data are summarized through October, 1972).

All costs of evaluation were paid by the Department of Labor grant and the Office of Education. An accompanying evaluation report prepared for the Division of Bilingual Programs, OE, gives more detail on the findings, and the report of the educational auditor confirms the validity of testing, analysis and reporting of data by an independent outside firm.

DELIVERY SYSTEM

ISSUE 1. What is the most effective way to provide continuity of educational services to children who move?

THE PROBLEM: The migrant child, in accompanying his family as they follow the crops, may be enrolled in a series of local programs. In each one he faces a period of adjustment getting used to new teachers, new procedures, and overcoming the confusion of picking up in the middle of sequenced educational materials which are also likely to be new at each change of schools. A mobile program, which followed the migrant child, could reduce this burden of adjustment by sending with him familiar teachers and familiar materials. However, the problem encountered by mobile programs tried in the past, is that migrant families do not move in large groups but tend to scatter in many directions. The result has been that with each move the programs have tended to lose track of more and more of the original clientele, so that they have produced relatively low rates of continuity of service to the same children from one location to the next.

THE APPROACH: The approach of this program was to train teachers to use an individualized teaching approach so that they could teach a cross-age range of children in a very small group, e.g., a "mini" center of from six to eight children. This many children could be found between the ages of three and five by following as few as three or four families who moved together. Over the winter the teachers received intensive training with the expectation that during the mobile phase they would be

required to work with the children in isolated settings where they could not rely on the daily supervision and support services which would have been available in a larger center. By recruiting adult migrants as teachers, who were willing to continue migrating as they served the children in this new role, the program was able to scatter its teachers in as many directions as the families moved when the migration began from the home base site.

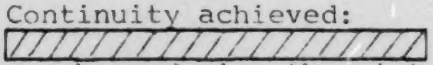
FINDINGS: The following chart gives a comparison of the continuity rate achieved by this approach, compared with the continuity rate achieved in other approaches funded by the national office of Head Start, Indian and Migrant Program desk, based on statistics supplied by each of the other programs.

COMPARISON OF MIGRANT HEAD START CONTINUITY MODELS TRIED SINCE 1969

MINI HEAD START MODEL

Approach: Train teachers to work independently with groups as small as six children moving in the stream.

Continuity achieved:

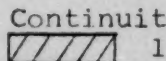


72% of the children served at home base during the winter of 1971-72 were served again at one or more instream locations during the summer of 1972.

NETWORK MODEL

Approach: Under one grantee, set up a network of centers in home base, and another network of centers in northern work location which also have a high concentration of migrants. Send "finder" information for children known to be moving to any location in the network, and give preferential enrollment priority to a child coming from one of the target areas in either network.

Continuity achieved:



19% of the children served in the network of home base centers during the winter of 1970-71 were served again in

one of the network of centers instream during the summer of 1971. And 18% of the children served by the network of centers in the summer of 1970 were served again at a home base center during the winter of 1970-71.

MOBILE MODEL

Approach: Move centers with a capacity of 30 or more children from one location to the next each time a majority of the children enrolled move to their next work location, eventually locating the mobile centers in home base communities identified as being the home base destination of any significant concentration of children who were enrolled during the instream phase and attempting to locate these children for reenrollment.

Continuity achieved:

▨ 18% of the children served during the summer of 1969 by the CMC mobile centers were served again in home base centers during the winter of 1969-70.

REFERRAL MODEL

Approach: Fund separate grantees, one to operate centers in the north and the other to operate centers at home base, requiring each grantee to operate programs using a similar approach to make it easier for children to benefit from moving from one to the other, and requiring a system of referral of children from one to the other for preferred enrollment.

Continuity achieved:

▨ 2% of the children served by the UMOI centers during the summer of 1969 who were referred to CMC for preferred enrollment were served again in home base centers during the winter of 1969-70.

ISSUE 2. Can paraprofessional teachers after limited training, working under the handicaps of moving, temporary facilities, limited supervision and long distance administration, maintain a program of high educational quality?

THE PROBLEM: Most career development programs outline a rate of progress extending over two or three years between the entry position of totally inexperienced aide, to the position of teacher where the employee would have full responsibility for both planning and conducting the educational program with only intermittent support from a head teacher or center director. Because this program must send its teachers out when the families migrate, the five or six month winter home base period is the maximum time available to prepare the migrant adult for this independent teaching responsibility. In addition, to accommodate the pattern of family movements, the teacher must be prepared to handle children of various ages who will make up the group she will work with instream. In addition, the instability of working conditions and generally poor environmental health conditions, produces a highly unstable attendance among migrant children. This defeats most attempts at presenting sequenced materials to groups of children, and requires individualization. Because of the scatter of teachers and families to different locations, supervision has to be by visiting staff, and accountability worked out by mail, phone and intermittent site visits.

THE APPROACH: To accommodate the cross-age groupings and the irregular attendance, the core of the educational effort was put into helping the teachers learn how to set up an independent learning situation for the group of children which enabled her then to take each child, one at a time, to sit on the floor near the group for an individual lesson. These individual lessons began in the child's primary language and as the concept understanding developed transferred to the child's second language. Beyond that the teachers were trained to interact verbally with the children at a high rate throughout the day, not just during planned lesson periods. To maintain accountability for the educational program an individual educational planning record was worked out for each child which the teacher maintained, and the trainers checked on their visits, and each teacher also sent in by mail a weekly report for each child giving the lesson focus and language used for each day's tutorial lesson.

FINDINGS: The success of the program as measured by the children's educational gains is seen in the following charts.

RECEPTIVE LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

The Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, a nationally standardized test which measures receptive knowledge of language, was administered as a pretest and after any individual child had attended the program for a cumulative period of 100 days (an approximate six-month interval).

EXPECTED RAW SCORE GAIN IN
Six Month period, nat'l norms 5 pts.

MINI HEAD START CHILDREN'S

Average gains in Spanish 10.8 pts.

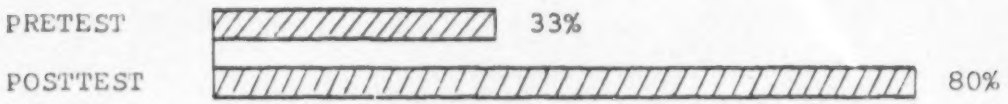
Average gains in English 10.2 pts.

The above scores indicate a language development gain of approximately two months for every one month in the program.

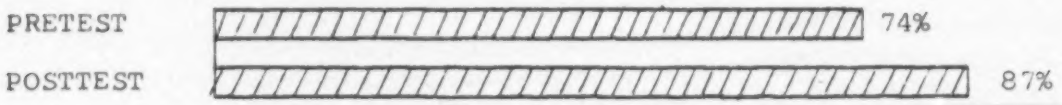
DEVELOPMENT OF VERBAL FLUENCY

Because the Peabody only tests a child's understanding but not his ability to use the language, a project developed test of verbal fluency was administered. This consisted of three questions and four prompts about pictures and objects the child was shown, and the standard for "passing" this test was that the child could use two or more complete sentences three or more words in length, or that he would use fifteen words or more in his total response. That this level of difficulty was appropriate to the target population is seen by the following results which indicate that only a third of the children could meet this standard when they enrolled in the program. More than half the children used less than five words in their total response on first testing, a level which is essentially nonverbal. After 100 days attendance in the highly verbal environment of the mini-head start program the number passing this test of verbal fluency had risen to 80% and the differences between the mobile migrant children and non-migrant children in a contrast group on verbal fluency was virtually eliminated.

MINI HEAD START CHILDREN WHO PASSED VERBAL FLUENCY TEST



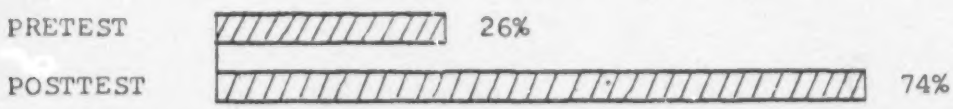
NON-MIGRANT CHILDREN OF SAME AGE AND ETHNIC GROUP



DEVELOPMENT OF CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDING

Children were tested in their primary language on their understanding of preschool concepts (color recognition, comparative sizes, sequences, the ability to match and sort objects, etc.). A passing score on the "Conceptos" test was 75%, or 27 out of 36 responses correct. The results were as follows:

MINI HEAD START CHILDREN WHO PASSED TEST OF PRESCHOOL CONCEPTS



USE OF MIGRANT ADULTS AS PARAPROFESSIONAL TEACHERS

ISSUE 3. After six months' intensive training, can a paraprofessional teacher provide children an educational experience comparable to that a professional could offer them?

THE PROBLEM: Since the home base period for migrants lasts on the average six months or less, the period of time when the paraprofessional teachers can be trained in a central location before they scatter out into the stream is very short. The professional teacher trained in college or junior college has from two to four years of preparation and practice. This comparison caused the national director of Head Start to comment on this program when it was initiated that he wondered if the extent of its reliance on paraprofessionals as teachers would result in a program that was "mini" in size or one that was simply diminished in quality.

THE APPROACH: The training part of this program was given a "dry run" a year before it was actually tried in Texas with the mobile migrant teachers who then moved out into the stream. During that first year in which training approaches were deliberately varied and carefully evaluated, three conclusions were drawn as to the most effective approach to training.

First, that progress is faster under inservice training when the trainee actually has responsibility for a group of children than with training in a setting where the trainee only has occasional responsibility for children she uses to "practice" on.

Second, that it is too narrow to gear training to specific curriculum--i.e., how to teach a particular lesson, and more effective to deal with teaching skills that relate to many lessons, e.g., how to question a child to see if he understands, etc.

Third, that general discussion of principles produces negligible teaching behavior change, and that imitative learning is a far more powerful training tool.

Between the "formative" first year and the second year when the program was initiated in a home base area and put into the mobile phase, the training curriculum was completely redrawn around the above stated principles. A series of training units were developed each designed to explain and demonstrate a very specific set of teaching behaviors. The trainers, who were skilled teachers, demonstrated the teaching behaviors, and the written training materials used many very concrete examples. In this way the paraprofessional trainee was able to learn by imitation as well as through discussion. Later the trainee was expected to demonstrate these teaching behaviors in teaching the children for whom she was responsible from the first day she entered training. The trainers watched the performance using observation forms keyed to each set of teaching skills. The observation forms differed with each training unit. The observation was later discussed with the trainee, and another practice session set up.

Specific teaching skills stressed in early units were how to gain children's attention and motivate them with encouragement,

how to increase the child's verbal and physical participation in learning by giving them many opportunities to respond verbally and with actions, how to question a child to get feedback on his understanding, etc.

To evaluate the change in teaching behavior a classroom observation measurement was used which recorded every teacher-child interaction for given periods of time. To form a standard of comparison, this same classroom observation measurement was used in preschool classrooms taught by professional teachers of the same ethnic background as the paraprofessionals. The results of training using the method above described, and the comparison between the project paraprofessionals and professional certified teachers is reported below.

FINDINGS:

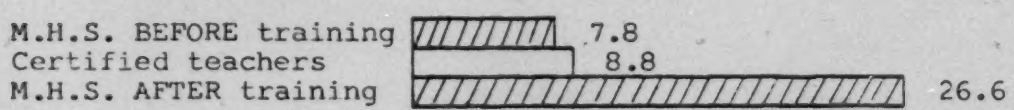
COMPARISON OF CLASSROOM INTERACTION PATTERNS

Mini Head Start Migrant Paraprofessionals

Certified professional teachers

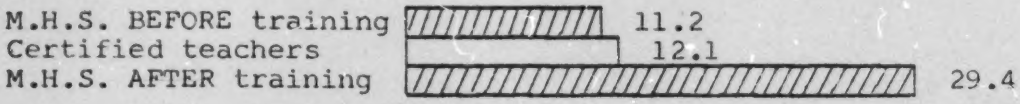
Average frequency of specific teaching behaviors during twenty minutes of classroom observation.

Questions asked

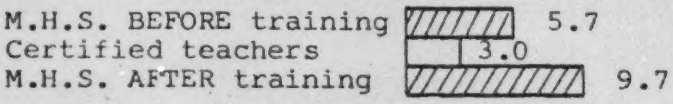


Opportunities provided for child to respond (e.g., question, request for an action, or conversational remark to encourage discussion)

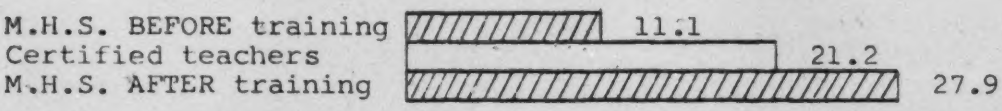
Teacher behavior focused on teaching concepts (as distinguished from comments directed toward the child's behavior or management comments to change activities)



Teacher behavior focused on encouraging the child



Child verbalizations



The certified teachers reported in the above comparisons were Mexican-American as were the Mini Head Start paraprofessionals. They were teaching four and five year olds, whereas the children in Mini Head Start ranged in age from three to five. The average class size for the certified teachers was 21 children, whereas the average class group of the Mini Head Start teachers was six children. Both programs used a bilingual curriculum which would be rated comparatively "high" on structure in a spectrum of curriculum approaches used with preschool programs. This was as close as the project could come to finding a similar preschool program, using certified teachers.

It is risky comparing teaching performance based on quantifiable acts, especially as there is no great degree of professional agreement as to what type of interaction constitutes "desirable" teaching. However, some conclusions can be drawn from this comparison.

First, the direction of change achieved with training by the paraprofessionals is in nearly all cases that which would bring their initial teaching behavior closer to the profile of teaching of the certified teachers.

Secondly, the change in actual teaching behavior the project achieved through training was very substantial, and in the direction being sought.

Finally, that paraprofessional teachers are able to conduct a highly interactive learning program, given adequate training.

LONG RANGE ACCOUNTABILITY

ISSUE 4. What is the best means of overcoming the erratic attendance patterns and high turnover in evaluating the benefits of a migrant educational program; and can long range benefits be found in an interstate program over unrelated local short term educational efforts?

THE PROBLEMS: Because migrants are only temporary residents of each community in which they work for part of a year, migrant programs are characteristically seasonal, short range, programs and there has been relatively little attention to measuring long range benefits. Where the interest in evaluation exists, it has been very difficult to obtain meaningful measurements. One reason is the characteristic high turnover in the migrant population. Analysis of the difference between enrollment statistics and average daily attendance statistics in OEO supported migrant programs reviewed over a period of years indicated that a characteristic turnover rate of 4 to 1 was a general rule. This meant that if testing were done at one calendar point, a large proportion of the children tested would be lost before the next testing point. And at any one time the children tested were likely to have experienced a very unequal period of attendance in the program, thus further confusing the testing results.

THE APPROACH: In this program, anticipating a constant enrollment of new children and very uneven attendance, a testing program was worked out whereby each child was tested within thirty days

of his initial enrollment in the program and again within thirty days after he had accumulated an attendance of 100 days. Attendance was kept individually for each child from the weekly reports mailed in by each teacher (a mail system was necessary because the program operated in four different states over the course of the year) with testers notified approximately bi-weekly of children who had passed a testing point. In this way it was possible to accumulate the test scores of a group of children who had received approximately equal periods of attendance in the program last September, the first analysis point, and another group of children's scores will be analyzed in February, 1973, the next analysis point.

FINDINGS: The above described system of evaluation was developed after a period of trial and error in which the complications of long distance communication and the means of obtaining testers at widely scattered operating sites was worked out. The system is now working smoothly. The past year was the first year of funding in which the unique delivery system was tested out and the problems of coordination and acceptance in each host community worked out. Initial evaluation of the educational results with the children, and the effectiveness of training seem to indicate that the entire program is feasible. Knowing that it is feasible, it is practical at this point to begin testing of a contrast group of mobile migrant children who receive service at only home base or at an instream location in order to answer the vital question: Is it all worthwhile? Do children who receive continuity of service in fact

progress faster than children who are served in only one location, or by unrelated programs as they move?

IMPLICATIONS OF THIS EVALUATION FOR NATIONAL POLICY MAKERS

This program was possible only because Head Start has reserved part of its national allocation for expenditure through a national office which can fund programs that cross state lines. If all Head Start funds were channeled through regional offices, or through state offices to local programs, a program of this type could not be funded. At present the largest program to serve migrant children by far is Title I migrant funds under the Office of Education. Unlike Head Start, all Title I migrant funds must, by law, be channeled through separate states.

This project is already anticipating that to evaluate the interstate approach to serving migrant children, it will be necessary to follow these children into at least the first two grades of school. The complications of receiving funds for the children above school age are awesome. Each state to which the families may move must be approached individually for funding of that portion of the program that would take place within its boundaries. And since each state must fund only educational agencies within that state, a cooperating local agency must be found willing to apply for and receive funds to pass on to this project. The lead time for planning and applying for each state's funds is about 18 months. A state can only fund a program if the project fits within its individually determined state priorities.

A refusal on the part of any state to pick up the portion of the program needed will leave staff unemployed and break the continuity that has been developed.

The fractured approach of every community serving migrant children with a different and unrelated program has been tried. If national funding were available to continue this program into the early school years we could learn if an interstate approach can be more effective. It would seem worth trying. And it might have far reaching consequences as national policy makers consider the best method of serving the mobile migrant child.